

Poems from AP Exam

Possible Works to be Covered in Class



Plants

by Olive Seniors

Plants are deceptive. You see them there
looking as if once rooted they know
their places; not like animals, like us
always running around, leaving traces.

Yet from the way they breed (excuse me!) 5
and twine, from their exhibitionist
and rather prolific nature, we must infer
a sinister not to say imperialistic

grand design. Perhaps you've regarded,
as beneath your notice, armies of mangrove 10
on the march, roots in the air, clinging
tendrils anchoring themselves everywhere?

The world is full of shoots bent on conquest,
invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces,
matériel gathered for explosive dispersal 15
in capsules and seed cases.

Maybe you haven't quite taken in the
colonizing ambitions of hitchhiking

burrs on your sweater, surf-riding nuts
bobbing on ocean, parachuting seeds and other

airborne traffic dropping in. And what
about those special agents called flowers?
Dressed, perfumed, and made-up for romancing
insects, bats, birds, bees, even you –

– don't deny it my dear, I've seen you 25
sniff and exclaim. Believe me, Innocent,
that sweet fruit, that berry, is nothing
more than ovary, the instrument to seduce

you into scattering plant progeny. Part of
a vast cosmic program that once set 30
in motion cannot be undone though we
become plant food and earth wind down.

They'll outlast us, they were always there
one step ahead of us: plants gone to seed,
generating the original profligate, 35
extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed.

The Myth of Music

by Rachel M. Harper

If music can be passed on like brown eyes or a strong left hook, this melody is my inheritance, lineage traced through a title track, 5	of her footsteps, the warmth of a radiator on my back and you present in the sound of typing your own accompaniment, 35
displayed on an album cover that you pin to the wall as art, oral history taught on a record player, the lessons sealed into the grooves like fact. 10	multiphonics disguised as chords in a distant room, speakers set on high to fill the whole house with your spirit, your call as a declaration of love. 40
This is the only myth I know. I sit on the hardwood floors of a damp November, my brother dealing cards from an incomplete deck, 15	But the music will remain. The timeless notes of jazz too personal to play out loud, stay locked in the rhythm of my childhood, memories fading 45
and I don't realize that this moment is the definition of family, collective memory cut in rough-textured tones, the voice of a horn so familiar 20	They lie when they say music is universal—this is my song, the notes like fingerprints 50
I don't know I'm listening, Don't know I'm singing, a child's improvisation of Giant Steps or Impressions: ¹ songs without lyrics 25	as delicate as breath. I will not share this air with anyone but you.
In six months, when my mother is 2,000 miles away, deciding if she wants to come home, 30	
I will have forgotten this moment, the security	

¹ Giant Steps is a jazz album (1960) by John Coltrane. Impressions (1963) is another album by Coltrane.

The Juggler

by Richard Wilbur

A ball will bounce; but less and less. It's not
A light-hearted thing, resents its own resilience.
Falling is what it loves, and the earth falls
So in our hearts from brilliance,
Settles and is forgot. 5
It takes a sky-blue juggler with five red balls

To shake our gravity up. Whee, in the air
The balls roll around, wheel on his wheeling hands,
Learning the ways of lightness, alter to spheres
Grazing his finger ends, 10
Cling to their courses there,
Swinging a small heaven about his ears.

But a heaven is easier made of nothing at all
Than the earth regained, and still and sole within
The spin of worlds, with a gesture sure and noble 15
He reels that heaven in,
Landing it ball by ball,
And trades it all for a broom, a plate, a table.

Oh, on his toe the table is turning, the broom's
Balancing up on his nose, and the plate whirls 20
On the tip of the broom! Damn, what a show, we cry:
The boys stamp, and the girls
Shriek, and the drum booms
And all come down, and he bows and says good-bye.

If the juggler is tired now, if the broom stands 25
In the dust again, if the table starts to drop
Through the daily dark again, and though the plate
Lies flat on the table top,
For him we batter our hands
Who has won for once over the world's weight. 30

For He That Looked Not Upon Her

by George Gascoigne

You must not wonder, though you think it strange,
To see me hold my louring head so low,
And that mine eyes take no delight to range
About the gleams which on your face do grow.
The mouse which once hath broken out of trap 5
Is seldom 'ticèd with the trustless bait,
But lies aloof for fear of more mishap,
And feedeth still in doubt of deep deceit.
The scorchèd fly, which once hath 'scaped the flame,
Will hardly come to play again with fire, 10
Whereby I learn that grievous is the game
Which follows fancy dazzled by desire:
So that I wink or else hold down my head,
Because your blazing eyes my bale have bred.

The Black Walnut Tree

by Mary Oliver

My mother and I debate:
we could sell
the black walnut tree
to the lumberman,
and pay off the mortgage. 5
Likely some storm anyway
will churn down its dark boughs,
smashing the house. We talk
slowly, two women trying
in a difficult time to be wise. 10
Roots in the cellar drains,
I say, and she replies
that the leaves are getting heavier
every year, and the fruit
harder to gather away. 15
But something brighter than money
moves in our blood—an edge
sharp and quick as a trowel
that wants us to dig and sow.
So we talk, but we don't do 20
anything. That night I dream
of my fathers out of Bohemia
filling the blue fields
of fresh and generous Ohio
with leaves and vines and orchards. 25
What my mother and I both know
is that we'd crawl with shame
in the emptiness we'd made
in our own and our fathers' backyard.
So the black walnut tree 30
swings through another year
of sun and leaping winds,
of leaves and bounding fruit,
and, month after month, the whip-
crack of the mortgage. 35

Thou Blind Man's Mark

by Sir Philip Sydney

Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought ;
Band of all evils, cradle of causeless care ;
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought ;
Desire, desire ! I have too dearly bought, 5
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware ;
Too long, too long, asleep thou hast me brought,
Who shouldst my mind to higher things prepare.
But yet in vain thou hast my ruin sought ;
In vain thou madest me to vain things aspire ; 10
In vain thou kindlest all thy smoky fire ;
For virtue hath this better lesson taught,—
Within myself to seek my only hire,
Desiring nought but how to kill desire.

An Echo Sonnet

by Robert Pack

Voice:

How from emptiness can I make a start?
And starting, must I master joy or grief?
But is there consolation in the heart?
Oh cold reprieve, where's natural relief?
Leaf blooms, burns red before delighted eyes.
Here beauty makes of dying, ecstasy.
Yet what's the end of our life's long disease?
If death is not, who is my enemy?
Then you are glad that I must end in sleep?
I'd leap into the dark if dark were true.
And in that night would you rejoice or weep?
What contradiction makes you take this view?
I feel your calling leads me where I go.
But whether happiness is there, you know.

Echo:

Start
Grief
Art
Leaf
Dies
See
Ease
Me
Leap
True
Weep
You
Go
No

A Story

by Li-Young Lee

Sad is the man who is asked for a story
and can't come up with one.

His five-year-old son waits in his lap.
Not the same story, Baba. A new one.

The man rubs his chin, scratches his ear.

5

In a room full of books in a world
of stories, he can recall
not one, and soon, he thinks, the boy
will give up on his father.

Already the man lives far ahead, he sees
the day this boy will go. *Don't go!*
Hear the alligator story! The angel story once more!
You love the spider story. You laugh at the spider.
Let me tell it!

10

But the boy is packing his shirts,
he is looking for his keys. *Are you a god,*
the man screams, that I sit mute before you?
Am I a god that I should never disappoint?

15

But the boy is here. *Please, Baba, a story?*
It is an emotional rather than logical equation,
an earthly rather than heavenly one,
which posits that a boy's supplications
and a father's love add up to silence.

20

To Sir John Lade, On His Coming of Age

by Samuel Johnson

Long-expected one and twenty
Lingering year at last is flown
Pomp and pleasure, pride and plenty
Great Sir John, are all your own.
Loosened from the minor's tether, 5
Free to mortgage or to sell,
Wild as wind, and light as feather,
Bid the slaves of thrift farewell.
Call the Bettys, Kates, and Jennys,
Every name that laughs at care, 10
Lavish of your grandsire's guineas,
Show the spirit of an heir.
All that prey on vice and folly
Joy to see their quarry fly,
Here the gamester light and jolly, 15
There the lender grave and sly.
Wealth, Sir John, was made to wander,
Let it wander as it will;
See the jockey, see the pander,
Bid them come, and take their fill. 20
When the bonny blade carouses,
Pockets full, and spirits high,
What are acres? What are houses?
Only dirt, or wet or dry.
If the guardian or the mother 25
Tell the woes of wilful waste,
Scorn their counsel and their pother
You can hang or drown at last.

When I Was One-and-Twenty

by A.E. Houseman

When I was one-and-twenty

I heard a wise man say,

“Give crowns and pounds and guineas

But not your heart away;

Give pearls away and rubies

5

But keep your fancy free.”

But I was one-and-twenty,

No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty

I heard him say again,

10

“The heart out of the bosom

Was never given in vain;

'Tis paid with sighs a plenty

And sold for endless rue.”

And I am two-and-twenty,

15

And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

The Century Quilt

by Marilyn Nelson Waniek

for Sarah Mary Taylor, Quilter

My sister and I were in love
with Meema's Indian blanket.
We fell asleep under army green
issued to Daddy by Supply.
When Meema came to live with us 5
she brought her medicines, her cane,
and the blanket I found on my sister's bed
the last time I visited her.
I remembered how I'd planned to inherit
that blanket, how we used to wrap ourselves
10
at play in its folds and be chieftains
and princesses.

Now I've found a quilt¹
I'd like to die under;
Six Van Dyke brown squares, 15
two white ones, and one square
the yellowbrown of Mama's cheeks.
Each square holds a sweet gum leaf
whose fingers I imagine
would caress me into the silence. 20

I think I'd have good dreams
for a hundred years under this quilt,
as Meema must have, under her blanket,
dreamed she was a girl again in Kentucky
among her yellow sisters,
their grandfather's white family 25
nodding at them when they met.
When their father came home from his store
they cranked up the pianola
and all of the beautiful sisters
giggled and danced. 30
She must have dreamed about Mama
when the dancing was over:
a lanky girl trailing after her father
through his Oklahoma field.
Perhaps under this quilt 35
I'd dream of myself,
of my childhood of miracles,
of my father's burnt umber² pride,
my mother's ochre³ gentleness.
Within the dream of myself 40
perhaps I'd meet my son
or my other child, as yet unconceived.
I'd call it The Century Quilt,
after its pattern of leaves.

1 A quilt is a type of bed covering often made by stitching together varied pieces of fabric.

2 Burnt umber is a shade of brown.

3 Ochre refers to a shade of yellow.

Icarus

by Edward Field

Only the feathers floating around the hat
Showed that anything more spectacular had occurred
Than the usual drowning. The police preferred to ignore
The confusing aspects of the case,
And the witnesses ran off to a gang war. 5
So the report filed and forgotten in the archives read simply
“Drowned,” but it was wrong: Icarus
Had swum away, coming at last to the city
Where he rented a house and tended the garden.

“That nice Mr. Hicks” the neighbors called, 10
Never dreaming that the gray, respectable suit
Concealed arms that had controlled huge wings
Nor that those sad, defeated eyes had once
Compelled the sun. And had he told them
They would have answered with a shocked, 15
uncomprehending stare.
No, he could not disturb their neat front yards;
Yet all his books insisted that this was a horrible mistake:
What was he doing aging in a suburb?
Can the genius of the hero fall 20
To the middling stature of the merely talented?

And nightly Icarus probes his wound
And daily in his workshop, curtains carefully drawn,
Constructs small wings and tries to fly
To the lighting fixture on the ceiling: 25
Fails every time and hates himself for trying.
He had thought himself a hero, had acted heroically,
And dreamt of his fall, the tragic fall of the hero;
But now rides commuter trains,
Serves on various committees, 30
And wishes he had drowned.

When I have Fears

by John Keats

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face, 5
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
 That I shall never look upon thee more, 10
Never have relish in the faery power
 Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

Mezzo Cammin

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Half of my life is gone, and I have let
 The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
 The aspiration of my youth, to build
 Some tower of song with lofty parapet.
Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret 5
 Of restless passions that would not be stilled,
 But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,
 Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past
 Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,— 10
 A city in the twilight dim and vast,
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—
 And hear above me on the autumnal blast
 The cataract of Death far thundering from the heights.

Here

by Philip Larkin

Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows
And traffic all night north; swerving through fields
Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,
And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields
Workmen at dawn; swerving to solitude 5
Of skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants,
And the widening river s slow presence,
The piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud,
Gathers to the surprise of a large town:
Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster 10
Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water,
And residents from raw estates, brought down
The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys,
Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires—
Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies, 15
Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers—

A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, dwelling
Where only salesmen and relations come
Within a terminate and fishy-smelling
Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum, 20
Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives;
And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges
Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges,
Isolate villages, where removed lives
Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands 25
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
Luminously-peopled air ascends;
And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach 30
Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:
Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

A Barred Owl

by Richard Wilbur

The warping night air having brought the boom
Of an owl's voice into her darkened room,
We tell the wakened child that all she heard
Was an odd question from a forest bird,
Asking of us, if rightly listened to, 5
"Who cooks for you?" and then "Who cooks for you?"

Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,
Can also thus domesticate a fear,
And send a small child back to sleep at night
Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight 10
Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw
Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.

The History Teacher

by Billy Collins

Trying to protect his student's innocence
he told them the Ice Age was really just
the Chilly Age, a period of a million years
when everyone had to wear sweaters.
And the Stone Age became the Gravel Age, 5
named after the long driveways of the time.
The Spanish Inquisition was nothing more
than an outbreak of questions such as
"How far is it from here to Madrid?"
"What do you call the matador's hat?" 10

The War of the Roses took place in a garden,
and the Enola Gay dropped one tiny atom
on Japan.
The children would leave his classroom
for the playground and torment the weak 15
and the smart,
mussing up their hair and breaking their glasses,
while he gathered his notes and walked home
past flower beds and white picket fences,
wondering if they would believe that soldiers 20
in the Boer War told long, rambling stories
designed to make the enemy nod off.

Evening Hawk

by Robert Penn Warren

From plane of light to plane, wings dipping through
Geometries and orchids that the sunset builds,
Out of the peak's black angularity of shadow, riding
The last tumultuous avalanche of
Light above pines and the guttural gorge, 5
The hawk comes.

 His wing
Scythes down another day, his motion
Is that of the honed steel-edge, we hear
The crashless fall of stalks of Time. 10

The head of each stalk is heavy with the gold of our error.

Look! Look! he is climbing the last light
Who knows neither Time nor error, and under
Whose eye, unforgiving, the world, unforgiven, swings
Into shadow. 15

 Long now,
The last thrush is still, the last bat
Now cruises in his sharp hieroglyphics. His wisdom
Is ancient, too, and immense. The star
Is steady, like Plato, over the mountain. 20

If there were no wind we might, we think, hear
The earth grind on its axis, or history
Drip in darkness like a leaking pipe in the cellar.

The Chimney Sweeper by William Blake from *Songs of Innocence*

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! "
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.
There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head 5
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."
And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight! 10
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.
And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing, they run, 15
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.
Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy. 20
And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

The Chimney Sweeper by William Blake from *Songs of Experience*

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying " 'weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!
"Where are thy father and mother? say?"—
"They are both gone up to the church to pray.
"Because I was happy upon the heath, 5
And smiled among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.
"And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury, 10
And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery."

Crossing the Swamp

by Mary Oliver

Here is the endless
wet thick
cosmos, the center
of everything—the nugget
of dense sap, branching 5
vines, the dark burred
faintly belching
bogs. Here
is swamp, here
is struggle, 10
closure—
pathless, seamless,
peerless mud. My bones
knock together at the pale
joints, trying 15
for foothold, fingerhold,
mindhold over
such slick crossings, deep
hipholes, hummocks
that sink silently 20
into the black, slack
earthsoup. I feel
not wet so much as
painted and glittered
with the fat grassy 25
mires, the rich
and succulent marrows
of earth—a poor
dry stick given
one more chance by the whims 30
of swamp water—a bough
that still, after all these years,
could take root,
sprout, branch out, bud—
make of its life a breathing 35
palace of leaves.